

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER
LISTED

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

OCT 16 2008

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

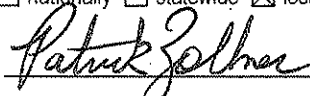
Historic name St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Other name/site number 177-5400-1775

2. Location

Street & number 701 SW Topeka Boulevard ☐ not for publication
City or town Topeka ☐ vicinity
State Kansas Code KS County Shawnee Code 177 Zip code 66603

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)



9/3/08

Patrick Zollner, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Kansas State Historical Society

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official /Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- ☐ entered in the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, (explain:)

St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	1	total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter Categories from instructions)

Religion: Religious Facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: Religious Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th & Early 20th Century Revivals

Late Gothic Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: Stone: Limestone

Walls: Stone: Limestone

Roof: Asphalt

Other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☒ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

Period of Significance

1908-1957

Significant Dates

1908, 1918, 1926

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Wood, Louis M. H. / Architect

Hawkins, S. P. / Builder

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Kansas State Historical Society

St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church

Name of Property

Shawnee County, Kansas

County and State

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property Less than one acre**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	5	2	6	8	1	0	0	4	3	2	5	7	2	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

2

Zone		Easting						Northing						

3														
Zone		Easting						Northing						

4

Zone		Easting						Northing						

☐ See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared ByName/title William W. Marshall (edited by KSHS)Organization St. John AME Church

Date _____

Street & number 2309 Mass AveTelephone 785-234-8444City or town TopekaState KSZip code 66605**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property OwnerName St. John AME ChurchStreet & number 701 SW Topeka BoulevardTelephone 785-233-3656City or town TopekaState KSZip code 66603

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

St. John AME Church is situated at the southwest corner of Seventh Street and Topeka Boulevard in downtown Topeka – within site of the Kansas Statehouse. Construction of the building began in 1908 after the removal of the previous church building that had been built during the period of 1886-1889. This stone church was constructed over a period of years – from 1908 to 1926. Major construction projects were concluded in 1918, 1920, and 1926.

Exterior

The building is over 11,000 square feet. It features Gothic Revival-style influences and is made of native limestone from the Deer Creek area in Topeka. The limestone is square cut with a rough-face finish. The windows feature smooth-cut stone accents and lintels. The east face (front) of the church, which faces Topeka Boulevard, is comprised of a large central Gothic Revival-style stained glass window that is flanked by smaller projecting front gable bays, each with a double-door entrance. Above each set of double doors is a stained glass window mimicking the large central window. The building has 15 Gothic arch stained glass windows and two Rose windows made of stained glass along the north and south side elevations. The windows are set in wooden window frames.

Two tall, unadorned brick chimneys pierce the asphalt shingle roof on the north side of the building. The cross-gable section at the rear of the building contains four smaller brick chimneys – two on the south elevation and two on the north elevation.

The building also features a basement that is partially above ground. There is a basement entrance on the north elevation. The south elevation includes a smaller gabled bay that extends from the central section. Like the rest of the church, this bay is made of limestone, but the gable is clad with wood shingles. It contains only basement windows. This section houses the organ, choir loft, and pulpit area on the interior.

Interior

The interior of St. John AME Church demonstrates a creative utilization of space. The sanctuary pews are south-facing and organized around two central aisles. The wooden pews with a metal cross detail were added sometime in the mid-20th century. The pews face an area consisting of the choir loft and the pulpit. An interesting detail is the pipe work remnants of a built in Hammond Organ. The sanctuary ceiling is covered with modern acoustic tiles. The interior generally reflects a mid-20th century renovation.

West of and adjacent to the main sanctuary is an overflow area, which can be closed off with a sliding door partition. This area, which served as the original sanctuary while the other additions were being built, has an east orientation facing toward the main sanctuary pulpit. On the north and south sides of the overflow area are rooms used as office space. At the rear of this area is a small built-in handicap elevator.

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas

Along each of the sides of the front overflow are staircases. The landing area for the staircase on the north side also has one of the original entryways. Walls divide the upper-level balcony area. Sunday school classes were held in these small spaces. On both sides centered high on the walls are two rose stained glass windows.

The lower level consists of a Fellowship Hall with an adjacent kitchen and spaces for storage and classrooms. This part of the building contains an original wall built between 1886 and 1889.

Additions were constructed in 1920 and 1926. Reverend A. J. Baker came to St. John Church in 1978. During his two years, the church finished paying for and paving a parking lot across the street from the church, which had been acquired a few years earlier. The pastor's study, finance room, and nursery of the church have been refurbished and the church's stained glass windows were refurbished.

A second building on the property is located immediately west of the church. It is a two-story front-gable residence. It is non-contributing due to alterations.

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places for its associations with the development of Topeka's African-American community beginning in the late 1860s. Throughout the congregation's 139-year history, various activities have extended St. John AME Church beyond the religious realm and into the political, civic, charitable, and business spheres. As a result, St. John AME Church leaders and congregants have played a major role in the activities of Topeka's black community since 1868.

Located at the southwest corner of Seventh Street and Topeka Boulevard, the congregation has owned this land near the Kansas Statehouse since 1882. The nominated building, which was constructed over a period of years from 1908 to 1926, replaced an earlier church erected in the mid 1880s. Major construction projects were completed in 1918, 1920, and 1926.

African Methodist Episcopal Church History

The African Methodist Episcopal Church is the oldest black organized religious institution in America. Richard Allen founded the denomination in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1787. Allen was committed to providing opportunities to African Americans. Since its inception, Topeka's St. John AME, the second-oldest African-American church in Topeka, has been committed to providing opportunities for African Americans in Topeka and surrounding areas.¹

The following church history comes from the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) website.² The AMEC grew out of the Free African Society (FAS), which Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others established in Philadelphia in 1787. Black members of St. George Methodist Episcopal Church, who were restricted in their religious expression, made plans to transform their mutual aid society into an African congregation. Although most wanted to affiliate with the Protestant Episcopal Church, Allen led a small group who resolved to remain Methodists. In 1794 Bethel AME was dedicated with Allen as pastor. To establish Bethel's independence from interfering white Methodists, Allen, a former Delaware slave, successfully sued in the Pennsylvania courts in 1807 and 1815 for the right of his congregation to exist as an independent institution.

The geographical spread of the AMEC prior to the Civil War was mainly restricted to the Northeast and Midwest. Major congregations were established in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Pittsburgh,

¹ In 1865, "Second Baptist Church, later called First African Baptist, issued its first call to worship from 'a brush arbor' on First Avenue and Crane Street and thereby legitimately claimed to be the oldest Negro church organization in Topeka." In Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 31.

² "About Us – Our History," AMEC – African Methodist Episcopal Church website. Available online at www.ame-church.com/about-us/history.php.

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas

Baltimore, Washington, DC, Cincinnati, Chicago, Detroit, and other large cities. Numerous northern communities also gained a substantial AME presence. Remarkably, the slave states of Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, and, for a few years, South Carolina, became additional locations for AME congregations. The denomination reached the Pacific Coast in the early 1850s with churches in Mother Bethel Church Stockton, Sacramento, San Francisco, and other places in California.

The most significant era of denominational development occurred during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Often, with the permission of Union army officials AME clergy moved into the states of the collapsing Confederacy to pull newly freed slaves into their denomination. "I Seek My Brethren," the title of an often repeated sermon that Theophilus G. Steward preached in South Carolina, became a clarion call to evangelize fellow blacks in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Texas, and many other parts of the south. Hence, in 1880 AME membership reached 400,000 because of its rapid spread below the Mason-Dixon line.

St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church

The St. John AME Church congregation traces its roots in Topeka to 1868. The congregation was then known as the Methodist Church Mission and was not affiliated with an organized religion. They met in a place known as the "Alley Barn," located in an alley between Harrison and Van Buren Streets, bounded on the north side by Second Street and on the south side by Third Street. Near that area were the homes of a few free African-American men and many ex-slaves who had migrated to Kansas. Many of the former slaves came to Topeka from Tennessee, and the church they eventually founded later served the city's "Tennessee Town" neighborhood. Several men and women formed a prayer circle that developed into the Methodist Church Mission. The mission had no appointed pastor.³

In 1877, Pastor John M. Wilkerson, the Missouri Conference's presiding elder at the time, became the church's first minister. Pastor Wilkerson chartered the eleven-year-old organization as St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church, which became the first AME church in Topeka. As stated in the original charter of 1877, the church was formed for "Religious, Benevolent, and Charitable purposes, for the promotion of religion, and piety amongst mankind as taught by the Holy Bible, and as taught and practiced by the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States."⁴

The congregation bought lots on the corner of Second and Madison Streets in 1879 and built a church. The congregation then appointed the Reverend Schuyler Washington to be pastor. By 1882, members had made plans to buy land at the corner of Seventh Street and Topeka Boulevard. They laid the cornerstone for a new building at that site four years later. The congregation worshipped in the basement of the church until 1889 when it was completed.

³ Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1982) 30, 31, 86.

⁴ St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church, Articles of Incorporation (May 11, 1877). Filed at the Kansas State Historical Society.

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas

In 1908, that building was torn down to make way for a new edifice. Only a part of the building was completed, that which is now the church's Sunday school section. It was finally finished in 1926. Although the church building was erected over several years during the early twentieth century, it reflects a Gothic Revival style with its pointed arch windows and masonry construction. Religious buildings constructed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries commonly featured the Gothic Revival style. Modifications to both the exterior and interior preclude this building's eligibility under Criterion C for architectural significance.

One known architectural drawing credits Louis M. Wood with a design that closely resembles St. John as it stands today. However, the level of his involvement with the construction of the church is unknown. Wood, the son of Samuel and Lucy M. (Curl) Wood, was born in Brownsville, Fayette County, Pennsylvania, on November 22, 1846. After attending the common schools and academies in the vicinity of his home, he entered Waynesburg College, in Greene County, Pennsylvania, where he remained two years. He subsequently took a two years special course of study in architecture at Cornell University. After leaving Cornell he returned to Brownsville and remained one year. He then spent a year in Chicago, from whence he removed to Lawrence, Kansas, where he remained from 1872 to 1879, when he moved to Topeka. Wood was associated with architect John G. Haskell from 1872 to 1887.

Church histories credit S. P. Hawkins as a builder of the current church. Although this is not confirmed, S. P. Hawkins may have been Spencer Hawkins who came to Topeka in 1880 as an Exoduster from Tennessee. He was a carpenter who supplemented his income as a trash collector, street cleaner, and municipal watchman.⁵

Reverend A. J. Baker came to St. John Church in 1978. During his two years, the church finished paying for and paving a parking lot across the street from the church, which had been acquired a few years earlier. The pastor's study, finance room and nursery of the church have been refurbished and the church's stained glass windows were refurbished.

St. John AME Church Within the Context of American Social Movements

Throughout the congregation's 139-year history, various activities have extended St. John AME Church beyond the religious realm and into the political, civic, charitable, and business spheres. As a result, St. John AME Church leaders and congregants have played a major role in the activities of Topeka's black community since 1868. The following three sections highlight St. John AME Church within three important historical movements: Black Migration, Literacy, and Equality & Civil Rights.

The Migration and Resettlement: This discussion covers the movement of significant numbers of African Americans from the Southern states, like Tennessee, Kentucky as well as other states such as Missouri,

⁵ Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1982), 178.

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
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Virginia including one immigrant from Canada during the mid-1800s. These ex-slaves and freed men were in pursuit of freedom, vitality, a greater standard of living. The Exoduster Movement to Kansas is tied to the St. John Methodist Church Mission, which was formed to provide religious community to African migrants and immigrants in early Topeka, especially since there were social lines drawn between black and white churches.

In 1865 there were 839 African Americans living in Topeka. The Rev. Columbus M. Johnson was a migrant from Tennessee and a member of St. John AME Church. Johnson also was a member of the Colored Emigration Board and an agent for the Tennessee Real Estate and Homestead Association. Johnson resided in Topeka and he performed duties as an agent in coordination with Benjamin "Pap" Singleton to bring 300 ex-slaves by steamboat and wharfs from Edgefield, Tennessee in 1873.⁶ Topeka was a drop-off point for ex-slaves some of whom were bound for Cherokee, Chautauqua, Morris Counties. C.M. Johnson went on to Morris County to enlist in the military and became Col. Johnson. Martin Oglesvie, a Tennessee Exoduster, came to Topeka in 1878 leading an early contingent of migrants that settled the part of Topeka known as Tennessee Town. Oglesvie was considered a "leading man" and pillar of the St. John congregation. The following early migrants contributed to the history of St. John A.M.E. Church by signing the Charter of 1877 under the Pastorate of John M. Wilkerson: Tolliver and Martha Bird of Missouri -1863; G.W. and Julie Brown of Virginia; and Robert and Janie Buckner of Canada.⁷

In 1868 the first location of St. John AME Church formerly called the Methodist Church Mission, met in a place known as the "Alley Barn," located in an alley between Harrison and Van Buren, bounded on the north side by Second Street and on the south side by Third Street. In 1868, the men and women formed a prayer circle within the Methodist Church Mission. At the time, all of First Street from the Santa Fe shops on the east to the Rock Island Bridge on the west were the homes of a few freed men and many ex-slaves who had migrated to Kansas. However, the hope of a bright future did not come easily and as a result of the hardships faced by these migrants there were several members of St. John A.M.E. who were members of the Kansas Freedmen's Association.⁸

On the Board of Directors of the Kansas Freedmen's Association were Rev. T.W. Henderson and Rev. John M. Brown, with Rev. J.C. Hubbard as secretary. One of the main problems confronting the new organization was the matter of maintaining cordial public relations. Migrants arrived in North Topeka, some with sickness and disease, often with no guidance or assistance for finding shelter and food. There were protests concerning the manner in which the newcomers' necessities were managed. Many of them were suffering from a variety of diseases. In one group of around 70 persons, such ailments as measles,

⁶ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986).

⁷ Thirteenth Census of the United States; 1910 Population sheet (2 & 7) (A&B)
http://content.ancestry.com/Browse/print_u.aspx?dbid=7884&iid=NYT624_957-0849

⁸ "Articles of Corporation and By-Laws of the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association." *Kansas Memory*.
<http://kansasmemory.org/item/210613/page/2>

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas

pneumonia, pleurisy, consumption, and the bloody flux were reported. Nearly all were suffering from "a sort of dietetic diarrhea."⁹

The Education and Literacy: While we have yet to discover evidence that St. John was involved in the formal education of blacks in early Topeka, its Sunday school and various social organizations undoubtedly provided an opportunity for participants to enhance their literacy skills. St. John's sponsorship of women's literary clubs enhanced participants' literacy skills in literature, fine arts, the humanities, and culture.

St. John hosted literary and social societies that discussed a variety of religious, literary, and political topics. One meeting documented in the local newspaper in 1877 noted the topic "'Lawyers are a Greater Curse than a Blessing to Society' was warmly discussed, but the judges decided to give the lawyers another chance, and so concluded that they might be blessings in disguise."¹⁰ Another topic of conversation at a meeting in 1879 was the "Indian". It was "resolved that the Indian has suffered more than the Negro at the hands of the 'White Race.'"¹¹ St. John AME sponsored the Pleasant Hour Literary Circle beginning in 1890, which brought together established African-American Topekans with young families and newcomers.¹² Other group organizations included the Ladies Sewing Circle of St. John A.M.E. Church, which was active in 1900.¹³ These groups held often held fundraisers in conjunction with the church for different service projects and to help those in need. The church sponsored an "educational day" as noted in the August 22, 1902 issue of the *Plaindealer*.

Additionally, newspaper evidence indicates early concerns among church leaders and members about inequality and limited educational opportunities. Before the passage of the civil rights statutes of 1874,¹⁴ black Topekans, meeting at the former St. John A.M.E. Church building in February of 1873, asserted that segregation in education, in public accommodations, and in common carriers clearly belied the reputation of Kansas and of the Republican Party for "complete liberty and exact equality."¹⁵ Author Thomas Cox suggests, "...Education was the only area of public accommodations in which discrimination had the force of Kansas law. The state statutes of 1874 stipulated that, with the exception of the common schools, segregation in public facilities which required a state license was a misdemeanor."¹⁶

⁹ *Telegram, J. S. Stockton to Gov. John P. St. John, April 12, 1879.*-- "Governor's Correspondence." KSHS Archive.

¹⁰ *Colored Citizen*, [Topeka] Vol. 2, 1877: The meeting of St. John Chapel Literary Society Largely Attended.

¹¹ *Colored Citizen*, [Topeka] Feb 1, 1879 Vol. 2; Indian vs Negro.

¹² Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1982) 97.

¹³ *Plaindealer*, [Topeka] July, 20, 1900; The Ladies Sewing Circle of St. John's A.M.E.

¹⁴ *The Laws of the State of Kansas Passed at the Fourteenth Annual Session of the Legislature, Commenced at the State Capital on Tuesday, January 13, 1874* (Topeka: State Printing Works, 1874): 82-83.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁶ Mr. Cox references B.D. Reams and Paul W. Wilson, *Segregation and the Fourteenth Amendment in the States: A Survey of State Segregation Laws, 1865-1953*. Buffalo. 1975. No. 6, pp. 183-6.

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St. John AME and its members were involved in matters concerning the Kansas Industrial and Educational Institute (KIEI), which was billed as the "Western Tuskegee" that was modeled after Booker T. Washington's school in Alabama. Soon after it opened, the Institute established close working relations with other institutions in the black community including churches. In 1896, a bazaar at St. John A.M.E. featured items from the Institute's sewing class.¹⁷ St. John AME pastor, the Rev. George Shaffer joined with Attorney James Guy to form a committee to protest Edward Stephens' allegation to the Topeka Board of Education that "...the colored people of Topeka are the most corrupt set of people I ever saw.'" According to author Thomas Cox, "there were no specifics regarding the basis of Stephen's claim or complaint," but Guy and Schaffer, among other black Topekans emerged as Institute supporters.¹⁸

Equality and Civil Rights: African Americans struggled for equality in many ways from their earliest days living in Topeka. Relief efforts and organizations – often in partnership with churches – emerged during the Exoduster movement of the 1870s. In response to health concerns, Kansas Governor John St. John appointed Reverend Thomas W. Henderson of St. John AME Church to the newly organized State Central Relief Committee in 1879 to oversee relief efforts directed toward immigrating freed men. Henderson was also involved in the establishment of Topeka's African-American press in 1878, a major event of this early period.¹⁹

The press became a major institution that connected the black community. William L. Eagleson, editor and publisher of Fort Scott's *Colored Citizen*, a small town in southeastern Kansas long a stopping place for blacks en route to Kansas from Missouri and points further south, closed his press and moved the operation to Topeka. Rev. Henderson was Eagleson's assistant editor.

The black press proved valuable for African-American-owned businesses. The National Negro Business League (NNBL), founded by Booker T. Washington in 1900 during a period of particularly bad race relations in the US when systematic discrimination against blacks posed problems that called for an organized response. The NNBL was active early on in Topeka and influenced the philosophy that black economic development should take. The local organization "sent James Guy, president of the local chapter, as its representative to the first national NNBL meeting, convened in Boston in August, 1900."²⁰

The Topeka NNBL remained active during the next several years. James Guy's brother Ira – a barber and personal acquaintance of Booker T. Washington²¹ – represented the Topekans at the 1906 national convention in Atlanta, Georgia, and was elected as first vice-president of the national organization.

¹⁷ Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1982), 157.

¹⁸ Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History. Cox, Thomas C 1980 p. 288

¹⁹ Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1982), 53-54, 83.

²⁰ Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1980), 337.

²¹ The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol.8, P. 325, July 1905, University of Illinois Press.

<http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/Vol.8/html/325.html>

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St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas

Topeka then hosted the national convention in 1907.²² Although the extent of St. John AME Church's involvement in the event is not known, the church leadership played a key part in that meeting. The church's pastor Rev. Dr. J. E. Edwards offered prayer to open a session at the Kansas Statehouse.

Another prominent St. John AME Church member and migrant from Tennessee, John Lytle, was a successful Topeka businessman who operated a barbershop from 1885 to 1906. Lytle was also a member of the Populist Party, embracing its value of black and labor equality in politics and elective office. John R. Lytle died at the age of 74 in Topeka at the home of his son Charles C. Lytle.²³

St. John AME Church hosted another NNBL event in 1914 when black Topekans listened with pride to the assessment of their commercial and economic development made by Ralph Tyler former auditor of the United States Navy and a national organizer for the NNBL. Tyler was a guest speaker at a meeting held at St. John AME Church to commemorate the 14th anniversary of the local chapter of the NNBL. Tyler asserted, "although Topeka has a Negro population of but 5,000, the race here has \$155,000 invested in business and owns \$700,000 worth of real estate."²⁴

A 1925 speech by Lutie Lytle at St. John AME Church reflects the national "Negritude Movement" - a literary and political movement of the 1920s and 1930s that was influenced by the Harlem Renaissance and in particular writers Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Marcus Garvey. The Harlem Renaissance was a time of highlighting black achievements in the literary field and the arts. An explosion of black writing and artistic expression re-framed the way that America viewed black identity. In tandem with the Renaissance, Marcus Garvey, a black West Indian, descended on New York after World War I and developed a charismatic form of leadership that earned him the persona "Black Moses," come to rescue black people from depressed times following World War I, when there had been numerous race riots through the U.S. Garvey offered hope through his Universal Negro Improvement Association, based on the slogan of "African for the Africans," and on the philosophy of black self-reliance and economic empowerment-some would dub-economic empire.

Lutie Lytle, a childhood member of St. John AME Church whose father John had been a prominent Topeka businessman, had become a famous black woman lawyer by the 1920s. By this time, she was living in New York, and was participating in Garvey's movement. In 1925, she returned to Topeka, where she gave a speech at St. John AME Church on the values projected by Garvey including the improvement of racial pride, self-reliance, and economic development. Although it is not documented, some in her St. John audience might have seen the resemblance in philosophy between Marcus Garvey and Booker T. Washington's NNBL. An excerpt from a newspaper account of her speech at St. John AME is below:

²² Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1980) 341-2.

²³ *Plaindealer*, [Topeka] Jan 05, 1934; Deaths, John R. Lytle.

²⁴ Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas*, (1980), 344.

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Mrs. Lutie Lytle, of New York who is visiting her father and brother, Mr. Charles Lytle, who is state Fire Marshal and Inspector, spoke at St. John A.M.E. Church, last Sunday night to a large and appreciative audience. She likes to use the name of Lytle in Kansas because the family is famous, well known, and loved by everybody. This is her hometown, where she was reared and educated.

Her remarks were about St. John AME Church and the old members who passed away, and the few who are still left and who were present, and heard her, were very much encouraged. She mentioned how she received her early training in the Sunday School, under Mr. W. Buckner, who has been the superintendent for the past forty years and how the Christian training she received, helped her all her life. She gave the people a descriptive view of the progress of colored people in greater New York. She spoke of the school conditions and of the children going to the mixed schools composed of all nations and that there were colored teachers in mixed schools all over New York. There was one particular district of New York which was composed of wealthy people, all the patrons, teachers, janitor were white and principle a colored man and nothing is thought of it, as 90% of the business in New York is based on brains not color. There are hundreds of colored men and women holding positions in both city and national governments. She says that Marcus Garvey has a vision that the colored people should claim Africa, as their land, and should use all effort to capitalize and support the continent where untold riches have not been discovered and the white man is making an efforts to control and enslave the natives in order to enrich their coffers. Marcus Garvey is calling the attention of the race to the wealth of this great continent and should be developed by the black race as well as the white race. In other words, Marcus Garvey is planning to have his race broaden out and have a vision of a hundred years hence.²⁵

Topeka played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s. The most nationally noted name from Topeka of that era is Oliver Brown, who was a member and assistant pastor of St. John AME Church. His name as the lead in the plaintiffs of what was know as the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka brought national attention to Topeka. Plaintiffs in other states' cases were also involved in this 1954 ruling by which the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a decision to end segregation in public education. However, that case must be understood within the larger context of the larger Civil Rights movement of the 1950s that featured organized peaceful protest, oratory, and litigation, spearheaded by, but not limited to, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. St. John AME Church was involved in NAACP activities in Topeka, as part of a larger social movement. For example, many St. John AME Church members, such as Zelma Henderson, participated in and led activities associated with local chapters of the NAACP.

²⁵ *Plaindealer*, [Topeka] 16, 1928, T.1269 KSHS; Miss Lutie Lytle, First Lady Attorney of the Race, Speaks at St. Johns A.M.E. Church.

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On April 12, 1953 an NAACP meeting was held at St. John AME Church and is noted in an April 10, 1953 newspaper article.²⁶ Attorney Robert Carter of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund was one of the speakers. He was the attorney who fashioned the original strategies of the Topeka case, which, with few exceptions, appeared to be followed to the letter as Topeka's legal processes unfolded. The gathering served as the local branch's annual membership drive. Rev. Edward Foust, Pastor of Allen Chapel of Kansas City, Missouri, gave the principle address. The program also recognized the founding of the NAACP and organizers encouraged the public to attend.

It should be noted that Lillian Gooden, assistant secretary of the local NAACP branch and member of St. John AME Church, appears on a certificate presented to the Topeka Branch of the NAACP in recognition for initiating and carrying through to completion one of the cases involved in the historic decision of the U.S Supreme Court on May 17, 1954, declaring segregation in public education to be in violation of the Constitution of the United States. Additionally, St. John AME church member Lucinda Todd was a leading plaintiff in the landmark case Brown v. of Board of Education in Topeka.

Summary

Throughout the congregation's 139-year history, various activities have extended St. John AME Church beyond the religious realm and into the political, civic, charitable, and business spheres. As a result, St. John AME Church leaders and congregants have played a major role in the activities of Topeka's black community since 1868. The connection between the church and the efforts to achieve racial equality in education and business are many and run deep.

²⁶ *Kansas American*, [Topeka] Vol.16-32, Friday, April 10, 1953; NAACP Mass Meeting Sunday At St. John A.M.E.

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Pamphlet. St. John AME Church 125th Anniversary – 1868-1993.

Plaindealer, [Topeka] 16, 1928, T.1269 KSHS; Miss Lutie Lytle, First Lady Attorney of the Race, Speaks at St. Johns A.M.E. Church.

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* There are two versions of this publication in the collections at the Kansas State Historical Society. While much of the information is the same, the page numbers differ between the two publications.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is located in Topeka's Original Town, Topeka Avenue lots 217, 219, 221.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary encompasses the land historically associated with St. John AME Church.

PHOTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Property Name: St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church
Location: 701 SW Topeka Boulevard, Topeka, Shawnee Co., KS
Photographer: Sarah Martin
Date: July 26, 2007

Photo 1: Front (east) and side (north) elevations, facing SW
Photo 2: Front (east) elevation, entrances, facing SW
Photo 3: Side (north) elevation, facing S
Photo 4: Northwest corner, secondary entrance, facing SE
Photo 5: Southwest corner and adjacent non-contributing building, facing N
Photo 6: Side (south) elevation, facing N
Photo 7: Interior, main sanctuary, facing W
Photo 8: Interior, main sanctuary showing pulpit and organ, facing SW
Photo 9: Interior, main entrance on east elevation, facing E
Photo 10: Interior, overflow sanctuary west of main sanctuary, facing NE
Photo 11: Interior, close-up of stained glass window on south wall
Photo 12: Interior, main stained glass window of sanctuary, facing E
Photo 13: Interior, basement
Photo 14: Interior, stairway up to balcony above overflow sanctuary



INTERCHANGE 20 MI.
2 U.S. 69 & 169) 57 MI.

EAST TOPEKA INTERCHANGE 0.3 MI.

230'

T 12 S

T 11 S

St. John A.M.E.
Church
Topeka, Shawnee Co.
15:268100 E
4325 720 N

